



# Department of Justice

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Western District of Texas

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **FEDERAL PRISON SENTENCES HANDED DOWN IN COLUMBUS, NM FIREARMS TRAFFICKING INVESTIGATION**

**United States Attorney Robert Pitman** announced that in Las Cruces, NM, today, United States District Judge Robert C. Brack sentenced four defendants to federal prison for their roles in a firearms trafficking operation.

Judge Brack sentenced 42-year-old Columbus, NM, resident Alberto Rivera to 90 months incarceration followed by three years of supervised release; 27-year-old Palomas, Mexico, resident Manuel Ortega to 70 months incarceration followed by three years of supervised release; 31-year-old Columbus resident Miguel Carrillo to 46 months incarceration followed by three years of supervised release; and, 32-year-old Columbus resident Gabriela Gutierrez to 24 months incarceration followed by three years of supervised release.

In July 2011, Rivera, Ortega, and Carrillo pleaded guilty to federal conspiracy, false statements and firearms smuggling charges. On April 4, 2012, Gabriela Gutierrez pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to smuggle firearms and make a false statement in the acquisition of a firearm.

According to court records, from approximately July 2010 to February 2011, the defendants were involved in a firearms straw purchasing and smuggling scheme spearheaded by former Village of Columbus Trustee Blas Gutierrez. Approximately 193 firearms, primarily AK-47 type pistols and 9 mm pistols, were fraudulently purchased from Ian Garland, owner of Chaparral Guns in Chaparral, NM, by Blas Gutierrez and others, including Rivera, Carrillo, former Village of Columbus mayor Eddie Espinoza, Ricardo Gutierrez, and Eva Gutierrez. Each falsely stated on ATF Form 4473 that he or she was the actual purchaser of the firearms. Court records also reveal that these straw purchasers had reason to know that the purchased firearms were illegally destined to people in Mexico. Gabriela Gutierrez' role was recruiting one straw purchaser and paying other straw purchasers for their criminal efforts.

To date, eight of 12 convicted defendants have been sentenced. Former Village of Columbus (NM) Police Chief Angelo Vega, Blas Gutierrez, Ricardo Gutierrez and Eva Gutierrez are still awaiting sentencing. Eva Gutierrez's sentencing, originally scheduled for today, was continued until a later date. No other sentencing dates have been scheduled.

**(More)**

## **Columbus, NM firearms trafficking sentencings**

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The investigation was conducted by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), Immigration and Customs Enforcement - Homeland Security Investigations (ICE-HSI) and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) with assistance from the Comandante Chihuahua State Police in Palomas, Mexico, and the Secretariat of Public Security in Juarez, Mexico. The U.S. Marshal's Service, U.S. Border Patrol, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, New Mexico State Police, Las Cruces Police Department, El Paso Police Department as well as other federal, state and local law enforcement agencies also provided assistance during the investigation. The case is being prosecuted by Western District of Texas Assistant United States Attorneys Greg McDonald and Steve Spitzer.

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